

About the Story

Annunciation to Mary (Luke 1:26-38)

“In the sixth month”

The sixth month refers to the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. We would know this if we had been listening to the story from its beginning as original audiences did. The story of “Annunciation to Mary” begins with this time marker. It concludes soon after Gabriel refers to “the sixth month” as evidence that his announcement to Mary is reliable.

Elizabeth is an elderly relative of Mary whose baby will be John the Baptist. The first story in Luke tells how Gabriel came to Elizabeth’s husband, a priest named Zechariah, and announced that she would give birth to a son. When Zechariah questioned this announcement, because they were so old, Gabriel made him mute. Zechariah regained the ability to speak when John was born.

Gabriel

In our culture angels are often portrayed either as cute little cherubs or as beautiful, friendly women. Biblical angels are not like either of those. Biblical angels were messengers from God. Their messages always meant a change was coming that would disrupt the way things are. People in biblical stories usually reacted to an angel’s presence with fear and uncertainty, as did Mary. So the first thing Gabriel had to do was to calm her down.

Many people who first heard this story also knew popular stories of the Greek gods, including stories about gods raping virgins, like the story of Leda and the swan. This might be another reason Mary would be afraid and “wonder what kind of greeting” Gabriel was giving her.

Mary

Mary was a poor, Judean teenager, probably about 14 years old. The name “Mary” means “bitterness.” The Bible has not recorded anything about her family. All we really know is that she was engaged to a man named Joseph who was from a high status family (“the house of David”) and that she was a young virgin (the word for “virgin” also means “young”).

Gabriel’s announcement to Mary that she will bear a son would have been very disturbing to her. The laws for engaged women were just as serious as those for married ones. If she got pregnant people would assume she was not a virgin and “they shall bring the young woman out to the entrance of her father’s house and the men of her town shall stone her to death” (Deuteronomy 22:21). Mary would have been anxious about being regarded as a criminal subject to capital punishment.

“Here I Am”

After Gabriel explains things, Mary responds to his news with the classic words of those chosen for spiritual leadership like Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Samuel: “Here I am.” She agrees to become pregnant by the Holy Spirit. She accepts the vocation God has assigned for her along with its risks and uncertainties.

Whatever the consequences, Mary claims her identity as “a servant of the Lord.” She is a strong, young woman She is up to the challenge God has given her.

Connections

Below are connections to the story that we might make when we listen to it in light of our own life experience.

A prayer suggestion:

1. Tell the story to yourself, picturing it in your mind’s eye.
2. Reflect on these possible connections to your life.
3. Then consider if there is something you want to say to God in response.
4. Listen for what God might be saying to you through the story.

❖ In this story the angel Gabriel tells Mary she is going to have a baby. So the story might be inviting you to consider a time you found out you were going to have a baby.

❖ In this story Mary accepts a difficult challenge. So the story might be inviting you to consider a time you faced a difficult challenge.

There may be another connection you make with this story. You could write that down here, or just hold it in your heart, and offer it to God.